

From Cool Britannia to Generation Berlin? Geographies of Culturepreneurs and their Creative Milieus in Berlin¹

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A New Cultural and Entrepreneurial Generation?

Defining the Novelty

In the wake of the political formation of a so-called “Neue Mitte” (a “New Centre”) in Germany in 1998, it is feasible to study the connections between political strategies and socio-cultural urban development processes. With the paradigmatic political change of 1998 in Germany, individualistic and entrepreneurial qualities were emphasised not only in political discourses, but also in efforts restructuring labour markets. These results interact with the urban sphere in a new way. The term ‘Culturepreneur’ refers to one potential champion of these developments.

Initially, ‘Culturepreneur’ is a compound of ‘cultural’ and ‘entrepreneur’ and was first suggested by Davies and Ford (“Art Capital” 13) following Pierre Bourdieu’s typological notion of an entrepreneur who embodies various forms of capital (Bourdieu 241). The term ‘Culturepreneur’ – so it is assumed – describes an urban protagonist who possesses the ability to mediate between and interpret the areas of culture and of service provision. The empirical material will demonstrate that there is as yet no professional category for the “curator”, “project manager”, “artist”, “website

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designer” who is transparently multi-skilled and ever willing to pick up new forms of expertise. He may then be characterised, first and foremost, as a creative entrepreneur, someone who runs clubs, record shops, fashion shops and other outlets, who closes gaps in the urban with new social, entrepreneurial and spatial practices. Such knowledge and information based intermediaries increasingly emerged in the gallery, art and multimedia scene in different European metropolises, foremost in London in the 1990s (cf. also Grabher “Urbi et Orbi” and “Ecologies of Creativity”). Davies and Ford (“Art Capital”) characterise a type of people who, in structural terms, are communicative providers of transfer services between the sub-systems “business related services” and “creative scene” and, in doing so, seem to satisfy a necessary demand (cf. Koppetsch and Burkart 532).

Due to this relatively vague analytical definition, the term Culturepreneurs represents an open (re-)search concept. With respect to the current debate on blurring boundaries between the economy, culture, knowledge and politics in the urban context, I propose to consider the economic, cultural and spatial practices of the new cultural entrepreneurial agents as testing cases in an urban ‘laboratory’ situation. In the context of lasting economic crises, they might play a decisive role as incubators and attractors for the formation of new creative knowledge milieus (cf. Matthiesen, “Zwischen Spardiktat und Exzellenzansprüchen” 11). Their creative and innovative business and art practices might combine local skills with creative knowledge and new ideas. This is highly desirable in a de-industrialised, declining and stagnating urban economy such as Berlin.

Culturepreneurs

Following the end of the Kohl era in 1998, a new political beginning of the type wished for by the generation of ‘68 seemed not to be directly achievable. Germany’s new holders of power took as their model Britain’s Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and the ways, means and strategies of New Labour. His politics provided the template for the envisioned new beginning of the German Federal Republic. Tony Blair, however,

had not carelessly discarded the political ideals of the British Labour Party, the party traditionally representing the working class. Rather, he gradually developed the vision of a new Great Britain with the slogan and buzzword “Cool Britannia”, for which he semantically prepared the ground. With the reformulation and reinterpretation, not only of existing social realities but also of those yet to be developed, a forward looking vision was created, initially on a rhetorical level. Carefully timetabled, and to the surprise of some, deregulation then appeared on the political agenda: Neo-liberal realities showed up in the rhetorical guise of views of society which were fit for the future.

Politicians and economic policy makers thereby assigned a forward looking role to creative professions in an economy based on information, creativity, knowledge and innovation (e. g. Landry; Leadbeater; Florida). Using the slogan “creative industries” since the late 1990s, they promised themselves as the generation of new forms of work, new work places and innovative markets.

After a first wave of very optimistic attitudes towards the new leading role of cultural producers at the end of the 1990s, the work and life situation of cultural producers and their relation to the social and urban situation have in recent years been the objects of increased critical scrutiny, on both the local and the global level. This occurred against the background of the stylisation of cultural as well as generally unpaid or underpaid activities and creative professions. Formerly assumed to be exceptions to wage labour, they served as models of self-determined work in post-Fordist society, on the one hand, to press ahead with the dismantling of state responsibility, and, on the other, to promote the entrepreneurial self-optimisation of the individual (cf. Verwoert 45). In this respect, the catchword “new entrepreneurship” alludes to individualised marketing strategies and social hardships, but also to a skilful alternation between employment office, employment and self-employment structures.

In 2004, a shift of perspective occurred in the European cultural and scientific community with respect to the relation between self-organised creative work and the politically and economically defined cultural economy. It was the daily experience in

different European cities such as Paris, Barcelona, London, Berlin, Munich, Zurich, and Madrid that forced many to rethink their societal as well as individual roles (McRobbie, “Creative London – Creative Berlin”). Especially cultural producers as well as social geographers, sociologists and cultural scientists started debating new economically and socially conditioned mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion. Today, the attempt to capitalise on creative work and to bring it under the direct control of the capitalisation process that is summarised in the phrase of the creative industries, has lost much of its public appeal with the flop of the New Economy and the “Ich-AG” (i.e. German for “I Inc.”). But the conversion to a society of self-reliant creative entrepreneurs who successfully market their own ‘obsessions’ is still underway, only less glamorously than in the mid to end 1990s (cf. Wießner).

The concept of the Culturepreneur has even become a new export good: In the case of Berlin, e. g. the city’s public relation agency “Partner für Berlin” (“Partners for Berlin”) makes an effort each year to send a number of entrepreneurial web, fashion, and multimedia designers abroad to represent and market the “New Berlin”. The design oriented branches are important inspirations for the successful export of a young and trendy creative “Berlin”, which has helped, as an urban and national label, to create a specific marketing identity for the most diverse creative industries.

In the following, the question will be discussed of what this social reconstruction, personified by the figure of the Culturepreneur, is tending towards, whom it serves, and what it embodies spatially, what effects it has on the constitution and the necessities of urban scenes. The thesis thus emphasised is: It will be important to investigate locations and spatial materials used by the Culturepreneur in order to grasp his role in the reconstitution, reformation and performance of new social formations such as scenes in the age of an increasingly individualised and fragmented urban society.

Following Koppetsch and Burkart (“Werbung und Unternehmensberatung”) and Casey (*Work, Self and Society*), I claim that, up to now, social diagnosis has ignored systemic changes (in the economy, culture, politics, etc.) concerning cultural professions (and

their norms, rules, values, practices). Within the framework of a spatially oriented sociology of work, an analysis of new job profiles in the field of knowledge and culture requires the systematic integration of cultural aspects, new communication and learning strategies, and modes of sociality. The crucial role of the spatial and locational aspects for the formation and establishment of new – and in the beginning insecure – start-up business practices, especially under the conditions of the so-called New Cultural Economy, has so far widely been ignored.

Therefore, I will firstly analyse the type Culturepreneur as primarily addressed by Davies and Ford (“Art Capital”). I am aiming to extend this notion and will question whether those new professional intermediaries can possibly also be regarded as ‘space pioneers’. The extent to which their appearance in urban areas can specifically be explained by involving geographic as well as social space will be examined. I will clarify which abilities are attributed to the Culturepreneurs, what kinds of agencies they require – or create for themselves – in order to build up networks, to arrange meetings, and to establish urban laboratories where new products can be tested and where experience and knowledge may be shared. Which urban locations do they need? Will they create their own locations and landscapes in the absence of suitable existing ones? How do they communicate, perform, and present themselves beyond the traditional settings offered by employment agencies, trade or art fairs and corporate associations?

Secondly, the aspect of performativity as well as the performative role of the Culturepreneurs in an urban context and in the development of cultural clusters, called “local cultural industries”², has not yet been the subject of discussion. The accumulation of cultural facilities and “cultural capital” in one place has – as often assumed – a positive impact on the site policy of “placeless” service economies. Particularly, it is the “new creative worker”, active in the “business related services”

² The term ‘local cultural industries’ reflects the importance of knowledge- and information-based service providers within an urban post-Fordist service economy, which has increased over the past ten years (Zukin). It is from those innovative and flexible industries that cities are drawing their hope for economic growth and symbolic image gains. In this context the so-called local cultural industries – expressions of an ever-growing urban cultural sector – are increasingly becoming the focus of attention (cf. Bassett, Griffiths and Smith; Pratt).

sector, who expects and requires such social and creative milieus for her/his professional activities (e.g. Helbrecht).

This article, at the same time, asks for the interpretations contributed by this type of people to the urban conditions, and also addresses the cultural economic modernization status of the new German capital of Berlin. With respect to Blum (“Scenes” 7), who concludes that “the body of literature and research on cities seems to be silent on the questions of scenes”, theoretical discourses will be integrated with empirical results, and thus a first step to overcome this silence will be offered.

To put it in more abstract terms: If the integrative machine “the city” no longer functions comprehensively, which visible and invisible social micro-formations will appear in an urban society? Which of these will take the place of the traditional, formal and, concomitantly, democratically accountable forms of work and engines of integration?

Processes of Individualisation and ‘Scenification’: On the Constitution of the Urban Space

Experiencing the Urban

An aesthetic of the urban and an atmosphere of limitless possibility are fertile soil for the new, creative entrepreneurs, many of whom have planted in it the seed of their own business or urban dreams. The politics of the British and the German “New Centre”, starting in the UK in 1996 with Tony Blair and in Germany in 1998 with Gerhard Schroeder, have a significant effect on the development of this new type of cultural entrepreneur. The addressees of these policies (and image politics) are representatives of a de-structured urban society that is not only extremely individualised and ambivalent. As a result of numerous uncertainties, lost communal reliability, and an alleged multi optionality with regard to life choices, individuals are required to make a series of new decisions concerning their behaviour in order to situate themselves in an urban society.

The spatial location of playful experimentation with this demand for individualisation is the city: The city is seen as the laboratory for one's own ideas, irrespective of the fact that the individual protagonists are subject to new patterns of flexibilisation and processes of social disintegration, which can best be absorbed in the urban. Individualised entrepreneurial existence strategies, however, are positively coded, in terms of socio-politics, and have been so at least since 1998. Here, the independence demanded by politics, and the gradual exclusion from the social security system are gallantly whitewashed by the type of language chosen. The result was a politics of rhetorical images and the redefinition of symbols. Images and symbols had to be found which proclaimed realities, rather than possibilities, ideas rather than delivery, attitudes rather than events. Following the German parliamentary election of 1998, Gabriele Fischer, editor-in-chief of the magazine *Econy*, suggested that the presentation of business as an adventure might be the formula to re-ignite desire for the project "work", and proclaim the realisation of daily existence not as a burden and daily chore, but rather as a source of fun and personal fulfilment. This type of politics addresses people "who want to break free, who want to do something, who still see business as an adventure and are not always complaining about bureaucracy and the burden of taxes" (Fischer 1ff.).

The City as an Adventure Playground

In retrospect, Gerhard Schroeder's image politics – in contrast to its self-proclaimed orientation towards the future – greatly romanticises the image of a self-reliant, pioneer-like entrepreneurship in the adventure playground of the city. Thus, on the one hand, the city organism appears as a potentially chaotic, open, but at the same time "cool" territory that provides ideal conditions for Culturepreneurs. On the other hand, the logic of the adventure playground means, subliminally, that as part of this individual entrepreneurial campaign, risks should not be judged to be existential threats, but rather be understood as new opportunities for orientation, i.e. opportunities for acquiring personal knowledge for future operations. As expressed by Gerhard

Schroeder in his 1998 statement of government policy, the “social net” of the welfare state must “become a trampoline”.

The counterpart to these images emerges in modified form in the marketing strategies of cities. The city is increasingly establishing itself on media image levels, constructed according to imaginary models (for example, historical Middle Ages, Tuscan or Mediterranean) and fixed typologies whose socially integrative relationship is difficult to discern. In the municipal context, image strategies are increasingly geared towards a group which is young, dynamic, happy to make decisions and willing to consume, and which, in turn, tries to correspond to the ideal type represented by these marketing strategies for the urban.

This way, specific urban articulations, for example in Vienna with a mid 1990s kicking drum'n'bass scene, in London with hip and trendy fashion makers, and in Berlin with young and cool multimedia and designers, became known to a wider audience. The cities, in turn, see in this clientele, whose self-image comes very close to that of a company – the “I Inc.” – the opportunity for an expansion of the business related service sector, for economic prosperity and for profit in terms of image.

One positive, yet ironic interpretation of this emerging milieu could assign to this new type of entrepreneur a much needed function in the economic sector of the city as the creator of bridges and systems of communication between the two subsystems of economy and culture (cf. Bude 9). At these hubs of communication, whose physical equivalents are club events, gallery openings and start-up opening parties, questions concerning the modernisation of the city are addressed anew. It is not the self-presentation and self-celebration of the individual, which should be accepted as principal significance of these patently performative events. The “places of the Culturepreneurs” are a platform for social interaction and transfer, rather than a permanent and purely economically structured place; platforms on which, using urban materials, new relationships can be tried out. The question of the present urban planning and urban development making of places in the city in times of significant

and generally accepted transformation processes is inevitably linked with the question concerning who such places shall be made or changed for.

Modes of Social and Spatial Re-Embedding

Socially disintegrated, the urban individual finds him/herself exposed to a large variety of alternative actions and decisions that can facilitate societal place making (cf. above all Beck 17ff.). ‘Dis-embedded’ from known socio-structural safety nets, such as the church, trade unions and codified associations and increasingly also family ties, the individual has to decide on some social contexts – such as milieus or scenes – that ensure suitably flexible social integration opportunities (cf. Banks et al.).

However, structural modes of “post-traditional communities”, noted in this process (Baumann 19), are very much unclear. Post-traditional communities differ from “settled and established communities” (Hitzler and Pfadenhauer 78) in that memberships can be revoked at any time since they are largely free. According to Baumann another difference is that they create an “imagined or aesthetic community” which provides the short-term illusion of being coherent in terms of forming opinions as to what is right and relevant. It has authority as long as it is assigned authority, since it has only little institutional sanction potential. The power aspect, posited by Baumann and Hitzler and Pfadenhauer, is based on the potential of persuasion, on the per definition “voluntary emotional bonds of the agents conceiving themselves as members”. However, from an analytical point of view, there are also obscurities with regard to participants of the “persuasion debate” (Baumann 19), particularly regarding the question of the how and the critical examination of individual contexts. How and where does the establishing core of the communalisation processes form? Or, to put it more directly: How is the urban space constituted nowadays? Who literally works towards its constitution?

Initially, it appears to be less significant to identify purely aesthetic and visible surface phenomena (clothing, outfit, etc.) as modes of integration and motives of the desire to

participate in scene-formation processes. While one may surely consider this to be a subordinate aspect of being socially integrated, questions arise with regard to the deep structures and subjective motivations of agents integrated into specific social, political and mental formations. My findings suggest that the mere participation and assimilation in a collective during one of the much-quoted techno or rave events *cannot* – in analytical terms – yet manifest the core of processes of scenification.³

Performativity and Spacing

More recent approaches, however, explicitly explore the rank of space and show that space establishing processes are progressively more complex. Löw (*Raumsoziologie*) pointed out theoretically that such processes are “brought about in acting by a structured arrangement of social goods and people in places”. According to Löw “objects and people are arranged synthetically and relationally” (204). She posits that spaces are not always visible formations but can also be materially perceived. Accordingly, spaces are ascribed a potentiality that is characterised by the term “atmosphere” (Böhme 24ff). According to Blum,

...the element of theatricality integral to the scene marks the importance of its site as an occasion for seeing; the scene is an occasion for seeing and being seen and so, for doing seeing and being seen. But to mention its occasioned character is to bring time as well as space to the grammar of scene. For if the scene is a site, a space for seeing and being seen, its occasioned character marks it as the site whose engagement is punctuated temporally as if it were a ceremony. (cf. Blum 14)

³ It shall suffice to refer here to Funke and Schroer (“Lebensstilökonomie” 219 ff.) who do not assess Hitzler’s dictum of a necessary integration into new forms of communalisation to be optional and conditioned purely emotional or aesthetical. Both authors hold that “sovereignty in issues of lifestyle is not superfluous luxury but competence of import for survival” (ibid. 225). Hence, the socially differentiating criterion is less an apparently freely selectable subjective stylisation but an ambivalent “non-compulsory constraint towards necessary stylisation” of the self (ibid. 227).

The constructivist approach by Blum and Löw makes a changed relationship between body and space, the individual and the temporal collective the centre of attention. The task at hand, further developed from this point, is to address the experiences and emotions, which are intrinsic in physical bodies and interact with the built-up space.

Widely noticed but rarely integrated by municipal powers in the communal politics, the number of private exhibition rooms and clubs in Berlin has multiplied in the 1990s, particularly in the latter half of the 1990s. Nevertheless, the do-it-yourself attitude of the producers had its impact on the city's municipalities: Until the mid 1990s, the illegal character of many creative initiatives was ignored or silently accepted. Later, forced by investment capital and reconstruction activities, this laissez-faire attitude was swept away. The fact that the efforts of the creative initiatives have their roots in the youth culture suggests a new authenticity, which is also an indication of a self-regulated variety. So far, the protagonists of this youth culture have found themselves constantly at loggerheads with the municipal authorities.

Berlin involuntarily supplied these cultural initiatives with open space, empty buildings and also an unclear planning situation. Due to the ongoing process of urban unification, existing open spaces provided the existential base for those activities. These cultural projects of the 1990s were confronted with the practices of many initiatives which had their ideological roots in the 1970s and 1980s. 30 to 40 years ago, Berlin's International Building Exhibition (IBA) worked towards establishing and strengthening the local level, the "Kiez"⁴, as the distinct form of a geographically based and essentialist locality. As they sometimes cooperate and sometimes struggle against each other, a conflict is diagnosed between two generations with distinct and significant differences in their spatial practices.

Other researchers claim to identify processes of spatial disintegration, for example, of centres of creativity (cf. McRobbie, "Clubs to Companies" 479). Using the case of Berlin, it will be demonstrated that outside the dominant and for the most part visible emplacement strategies of the historical and desired service complexes in the inner city

⁴ German for 'hood'.

parts, new tactics in spatial practices can be observed by new urban protagonists, the Culturepreneurs. The analysis of these can provide insights into the current social formation structures. The following cases represent an urban platforms deal with action in the tense relationship between neo-liberal existential basic conditions and the desire for an economic and artistic realisation of one's own ideas. This simultaneity and complexity of the observed processes refer all the more – on a methodological level – to context-sensitive approaches and a view of the transformation scenes. This suggests that it is appropriate to also examine the emergence of the new as something novel (cf. Matthiesen 130).⁵

Launching an Entrepreneurial Project

Preparing the Place

The first case study deals with three men aged 27, 32 and 35, two of whom studied graphic design in Cologne until 2000. They worked there during their studies in different offices and agencies, and acquired additional experience after graduating, as employees with far-reaching competences and tasks in other – also international – agencies. In late 2001, they moved from Cologne to Berlin and searched for office space in the Prenzlauer Berg borough. They found a suitable office near Helmholtzplatz, which was a disused shop with a floor space of approx. 145 m². The rent was quite cheap, they redecorated the rooms themselves, brought their equipment,

⁵ The empirical material for the following analysis is based on 25 interviews chosen by virtue of their entrepreneurial and artistic activities, conducted by the author in Berlin between September 2002 and April 2003. A preliminary methodological remark: whenever an individual case is mentioned below in methodical terms I am aiming at generating themes, categories and narratives from sequences of guideline-supported and semi-standardised interviews. What will come to the fore in doing so are above all life-world-related aspects as well as situational and socio-spatial ascriptions that provide a superior-level explanatory basis for certain agents and their pertaining professional groups and their networks. Those levels of meanings are reconstructed, i.e. developed from the statements in the material, subjected to comparative reviews and contrasted. First generalisations of professional biographic transformation situations and their spatialisation become possible. The latter in turn then do not provide information about an individual case but about the specific milieus, scenes, and social arenas, institutional local, regional and supra-regional intertwining and structural situations, which are articulated in the sequences of the case. Ethnographic field observations generate further centrally observing angles of incidence into specifically condensed situations.

and 'organised' table boards. An Internet connection was established via a free hanging cable from their window across the courtyard to another office next door. Work commenced with an enormous party.

Field record: We are sitting in the anteroom and they explain to me some of their projects, also planned ones. It is not really peaceful, the anteroom has to be cleared since a friendly gallery owner and her artist plus some works from Bremen are due to arrive tonight. The anteroom facing the street – where work is done at four large desks during daytime – is emptied. The next-door DJ is setting up his sound and light equipment in the doorway (the light gear includes a multi-mirror disco sphere and a video projector), some beer crates are lugged in.

Half an hour later the room is empty, the curator appears and starts placing the objects, frames are put up at the walls, carpets unrolled on the floor, flyers and information leaflets put on display. There is no formal opening. At some point the whole room is filled with people. At about 23:00 hrs the room is brimming over, smoke, electronic music wavers across the heads of the visitors, some of them are dancing, more people pass by and crane interested heads into the place or push off. Colleagues, competitors and critics arrive, most discussions focus on potential orders, past jobs and safe contacts.

At about 1:00 hrs two of the three office owners stand outside in front of the door, exchange views with colleagues from another agency. I learn that two of the three owners have registered unemployed with the labour office, use another person, namely the third owner, as a stooge to bill their services and that the two former are currently trying to organise start-up capital out of their phase of unemployment. The field discussion was started by asking "Are you also going about things like this...?", and was casually answered in the affirmative (end of record, documented on 23 May 2003 by the author).

Forming Identities

Their identity-creating work is rooted in their training as graphic designers at the University of Applied Sciences so that they may be called – in the widest sense – design-intensive symbol producers. They define the specifications of their production with the term “holistic designs”, which for them implies necessarily high design standards as well as an artistic self-image in the performance of their activities. This specification shows, on the one hand, artistic motives; on the other hand it is unspecific, adjustable and extremely variable in terms of content.

Their project-based studies at the University of Applied Sciences were characterised by open structures or ‘quasi pre-programmed independence’. The project studies trained them to become ‘universal dilettanti’. These self-ascriptions show learned but also unquestioned flexibility aimed at attaining the necessary and professionally desired expressivity, as well as absolute professional, but also personal control of the content of their products.

Conditioned by the socialisation patterns of their education, the transition to their work life appears to have been successively prepared by their life-world. Actually, there is no well-defined entrance into work life; education and work life were rather entwined over several years. The continuation of those entwined phases systematically manifests itself in the conceptualisation of their business: the latter will be established, besides its thematic openness, also in socio-organisational terms, as an interaction platform and docking-stepping grounds station for other agents (friends, acquainted and professionally associated agents etc.). Consequentially “working in a team” entails a professional integration of like-minded friends and even partners. Consistently, the name of the *Greige* office does not cite the names of the owners, as is customary in Germany, such as Springer & Jacoby. The name *Greige*, a reference to a colour between grey and beige as coined by Le Corbusier, refers rather to the socio-organisational idea of interdisciplinary work in network structures.

Work in networks is structured systemically, where every agent from different European cities who temporarily collaborates on a project, contributes his or her skills

to the current work. This organisational structure can be swiftly and flexibly adjusted to any external requirements. Thus, new enquiries and orders may be addressed within a few hours or days, by putting together appropriate teams. A suitable team can be presented to third-party clients not only as a quantitatively large but also as a perfectly suited design office.

This organisational model consistently combines and links work and private spheres. Strictly speaking, there are no classical work time models and time structure models that find application in all situations. The previously separated life-world spheres of “work” and “leisure” are defined according to specific order and employment situations. The organisational structures of agents in the field of symbol-intensive service provision swiftly point to – as it is documented in the above record – hazardous subsistence conditions of urban cultural-economic transformation structures, but also to strategic responses of individual precarious situations. Hence, in the following the focus will be placed on questions about the tactics and strategies that can be derived from the self-ascriptions of agents and that are developed in times of extremely low competition (due to hardly any order intake).

Special emphasis is placed, on the one hand, on free design competition, networking and integration approaches, as well as on cooperation with associated offices. On the other hand, we can hypothesise from our observations that micro-spatial strategies are used to subject immobile and ostensibly clearly programmed office space to various sorts of temporary change and re-programming. However, the following is less an artistic or effectiveness-related evaluation of such micro-spatial policies, rather than an investigation into the variable range of strategic approaches adopted by expressiveness-gearred professional groups as they offensively react to difficult subsistence conditions in times of economic crisis and structural upheaval. Place matters!

Such internal orientation and (re-)structuring of places shows a sample of elements of responses to the extreme structural crisis and scarcity conditions of Berlin. Yet, besides their organisation as a flexible supply-oriented platform with extensions in

many other European cities, I have also identified approaches to a development of creative demand options. The necessary organisationally competitive character of the *Greige* enterprise highlights communicative strategies in order to make proactive use of the micro-location ‘office’, in the sense of place-making, as a hub for fluid social communalisation and cultural scenes targeting new attractiveness.

Playing (with) the Places

Culturepreneurs’ locations are part of a highly individual and, at the same time, playful practice of (attracting) attention. In order to register locations in the minds of other people, a specific policy of location and scene is necessary, which renegotiates (a sense of) cultural belonging. *Greige*, for example, may be the meeting place for an open, but clearly defined, group of friends, colleagues, and rivals, for the interested and for the curious. Its access and perception are guided by policies, which displays similarities to those of a club. However, the familiar selection mechanisms of a club – i.e. bouncers turning people away at the door – take on a more subtle form in the case of *Greige*. A variety of media, such as word of mouth recommendation, or mailing lists and flyers ensure that information on forthcoming events, exhibition openings, or even new products, reaches a specific target group. Apart from this information policy, however, efforts are also made to ensure that the location *Greige* occasionally recedes into oblivion. For months on end, nothing happens; no events are organised, partly, because there are other matters to be attended to.

In the case of *Greige*, we can see that a game is being played with visitors, camouflaging the location, and then returning it to public consciousness, at a later date. *Greige* works without an annual plan and announces art exhibitions at short notice by sending invitations via e-mail lists, above all to selected friends and interested members of the wider art scene. The header on the e-mail indicates (or fails to indicate) membership to what has thus ostensibly become a scene and is the criterion for inclusion or exclusion in a social formation about which no one bothers to talk openly.

This, at first, surprising and seemingly contradictory strategy of hiding is a sort of behaviour, which evokes memories of the old socialist mentality with regard to the service industry: the customer is not king, and business apparently doesn't matter. This strategy is also employed outwardly: to the outside world, the appearance of the location *Greige* offers no indication of what events take place inside. Only insiders and those with local knowledge perceive it as a place where events and performances take place; only they can read the local urban landscape. In positioning itself in urban space, by means of this policy of hide-and-seek, *Greige* creates not only social difference, but also keeps the broad masses at a distance.

When eager searchers do nonetheless find the location, another subtle differentiation criterion is brought into play. At the parties which take place, for example, after openings, present guests are offered a variety of identification patterns by means of art exhibited and electronic music played. It is the assignment to these cultural-symbolic products – based on the extent to which the performance can be experienced and interpreted – which, in the first place, makes a memorable participation in the event possible. This is where the subtle exclusion strategy lies: no one is refused entry to the location; indeed it is rather the case that anyone may be admitted, but only a few are integrated. This integration is also a challenge to secure membership on a permanent basis, the changeable character of the location guarantees, in the first instance, that no trend is created, that no financial dependencies arise, and that commerce does not hinder the creative enterprise. It is this act of maintaining a balance of permanent change in the differentiation criteria, an avoidance of pure commercialisation, and the employment of hiding strategies, which ensures the survival of this location and its protagonists, for some time. If they were to position themselves as an open counterpart to existing cultural and social currents (the “underground” model), they would immediately be culturally chewed up by the urban trend machine and financially destroyed, as indeed they would be, too, if they adopted the “mainstream” model (as was the case in Berlin for Hackesche Höfe or other locations).

Their interest in location, and in what location expresses, indicates, for one thing, pleasure in the local coding game. Pleasure, however, comes up against the necessity

of dressing the location in a specific narrative of location-symbolism in order to be perceived at all. In this game with the significant, locations are, for this reason, battlefields of symbolic landscapes in the post-industrial city. Subtle tactics of social positioning can be observed at (and in dealing with) these locations. Even places in relatively established housing areas display heterotopic characteristics. They can no longer be categorised as underground or mainstream, as would have been perfectly possible a few years ago: those who operate and play at the locations have achieved a degree of reflection, which makes it possible for them to employ emplacement tactics which work with and play in economic and cultural terms with social Utopias, with alternative blueprints. They make use of traditional standards of Bohemianism. Yet, for this very act of adaptation and their understanding of the *Zeitgeist*, they are pop-revolutionaries and, so, responsible for post-urban transformation processes.

Exploring and Designing Berlin

Ethnographers and Storytellers of the Urban

Our interview partners (one female, one male) are 26 and 27 years old and hail from Lucerne (Switzerland). They received training as graphic designers in Switzerland. In 1997/8 they relocated to Berlin where they worked as interns in several agencies, took on the Art Direction of a magazine and did mainly freelance graphic work. Since January 2002 they have been working together in a disused shop in Friedrichshain, in the borough of Kreuzberg-Friedrichshain. They have been integrated into a residential quarter management project titled “Boxion”.

Their identity-creating work is rooted in a wide range of creative design production, mainly in the print media but increasingly in the Internet sphere. Besides smaller orders, they were given the opportunity of designing the magazine *Berliner* in 2000. Three issues of this high-quality magazine were published before it was discontinued. It was a medium in which – *nomen est omen* – Berlin was re-discovered. The

following is a closer review of the identificatory content in the work on a Berlin magazine by the two Swiss partners mentioned above.

What is striking is their approach to “move something with a company formation”. This moment of movement and moving in space presupposes a space that is not pre-moulded, or better, it presupposes ‘space’ per se. This sense construction of a space that is, in their view, not pre-moulded, forces the agents to develop strategies of self-assertion in space, to quasi discover their own territory, and to symbolically occupy and re-code it. The counter-horizon of Berlin, formulated and stylised in the process as a *terra incognita* or a ‘no land’, consists of the morbid charm of the former workers’ borough of Friedrichshain, cultural artefacts in the form of East German residents, their hidden leftover stocks of cultural knowledge, socialist practices and behaviours. Thus, this self-ascription of the agents shows a moment of ethnographic significance. The two agents conceive themselves as strangers in the city of Berlin, and basically take on the role of ethnographers, via which they re-define and re-evaluate the social relationship between insider and outsider, old and new, in and out.

They use a variety of attributes to describe a romantic situation of Berliners, an almost extraterrestrial situation, a spatial peculiarity that is hard to match. The symbolic space of Berlin appears to the agents to be a project, a space for movement that seems to be, for the most part, suited to their current life-world, and their professional and social situation.

“Being Berliner”

This sense-making role, however, does not only exhibit exclusively self-referential aspects, but also includes clear signal patterns of a network-like sociality: both agents develop a product, a magazine titled *Berliner*, which represents, on a graphical level, the disparate cartography of how the two protagonists perceive this city. In other words, this product bundles social and psycho-geographical orientation knowledge that is distributed to a fluid community of temporarily like-minded people.

This process imparts an image of a new location in Friedrichshain, a “scene and pub borough” that has been prospering for years, as a moving event space. The ‘mood level’ and new borough initiatives and siting practices by ‘culture management agencies’ (such as the “Spielfeld” agency⁶) are accompanied by very concrete structural changes at the ‘business structure’ level. Thus, the semantic, graphic and event-oriented special expertise is produced, imparted, distributed and supplied to a broad clientele by ‘scene’ experts. It is at this intersection that the ability to recognise socio-spatial potentials and their economic utilisation is combined with entrepreneurial philosophy. The company name chosen by the agents, ‘Substrate’, is programmatic, since it commodifies their entrepreneurial cultural practice and hence represents their life-world identity.

This construction and situational self-ascription forms the bed of the bohème-like marginal position (that is also related to a cliché) from where the two Swiss can position themselves as artists and make professional use of their situation. Hence, the obvious positioning and self-ascription fits in with the spatially conditioned location perception in Friedrichshain so that the – in their view – disparate transformation material (old workers vs. new designers, anonymity vs. socialistically idealised practices, etc.) permits the recognition of a stimulation substrate which, in turn, is reflected in the products of the two Swiss. What is not shown are economic and social interdependencies or any other factors that keep the business economically afloat. Rather, they search for a necessary stage to formulate their biographical self-design in the unfiltered austerity and symbolically not yet fully used geography of the local. In their self-stylisation, the agents produce a social arena, a mental territory within which they relish re-coding the social hardships, deprivations and stagnation situations as a subtle stimulation potential.

The counter-horizons are the common myths of Berlin, the “city as an island” that is to be conquered, “Berlin mentalities”, but also structures of local opportunities brought about by economic decline in the perforated – and declining – workers’ boroughs of

⁶ Spielfeld is a company and event agency communicating and managing cultural projects in socio-economic instable housing areas of Berlin (online, 15 May 2004, available: www.spielfeld.net).

Berlin. Hence, the basic motive correlates with Berlin metaphors of the early 1920s, during the Weimar Republic, when individual and also entrepreneurial self-assertion as both a cultural and an urban project fully caught on for the first time, and fully unfolded its potential.

The high degree of adjustability between professional and biographic situations is combined with the geographical place-making of the 'Substrat' enterprise. The economic transformation context of Berlin, with its neo-liberal and extremely flexibilised labour market demands in times of scarcity is translated as an invitation to cultural self-assertion and entrepreneurial self-realisation. The territory that is not yet fully transformed and encoded is identified as a stimulating milieu, with references to the 1920s, when the city was made out as an adventure playground and site for new cultural projects.

Culturepreneurs? Spatial Competence!

Empirical field material made it possible to show for the first time that, for the city of Berlin, Culturepreneurs' individual emplacement strategies are not to be read as just the product of neo-liberal policies and processes: attaining autonomy has been forced upon them by a need to secure a livelihood. Culturepreneurs embody a highly ambivalent relationship: the catchword "new entrepreneurship" demonstrates individualised marketing strategies and social hardships. It also indicates the temporarily skilful alternation between different modes of institutional integration (McRobbie, "Kunst, Mode und Musik" 14; McRobbie, "Clubs to Companies" 476).

The spatial practices of these urban pioneers provide insights into new urban ways of behaving and are helpful to the analysis of communal culture. They also allow, what Angela McRobbie ("Creative London – Creative Berlin" 3ff) named "cultural individualisation", the observation of the playful (self) production and performance tactics of these individuals on the urban stage. These tactics reveal consciously constructed identificatory opportunities for adoption and adaptation, deliberately

littered with contradictions for the purpose of fine distinction. The spatial practices and entrepreneurial activities are treated as significant changes in the reconfiguration of the organisation of work, relative to space and place, and focus on how these subjects operate in often precarious life situations.

Such an individual is also constantly finding new niches for work and thus inventing new jobs for him/herself (e.g. “incubator”, “creative agent” etc.). S/he is highly mobile moving from one job or project to the next, and in the process also moving from one geographical site to the next. Social interaction is fast and fleeting. Friendships need to be put on hold, or suspended on trust, and, when such a non-category of multi-skilled persons is extended across a whole sector of young working people, there is a sharp sense of transience, impermanence, and even solitude (Augé).

The field material described characteristics and ways of perceiving through which Culturepreneurs make themselves known as a new urban type on the urban stage: they form a new type of relationship between their work practice, entrepreneurial turnover and their own social and creative development. This set of activities must – according to the author’s observations – be framed by and tied to a tension-filled, ambivalent self-made ensemble of spatial images and codes. The result is difficult to interpret from the outside but is, and this is crucial, interpretable for insiders.

Ronald Hitzler’s sociological interpretations are blind to space. They do not take into account the spatial dimension when analysing symbolic differentiation processes (Hitzler, Bucher and Niederbacher 26). On the one hand, according to the author’s findings and the observed agents in Berlin, differentiation processes run on the basis of the readability of the physical environment without which inclusion and exclusion on the social-symbolic level would not be possible. On the other hand, statements made by Culturepreneurs indicate a playful attitude towards these very codes, which are sometimes connected associatively and sometimes ironically instrumentalised in order to express their own placing strategies. Bourdieu’s “fields” and sorts of capital (cultural, social or economic) are reflectively “sampled” for purpose of individual emplacement strategy as well as specific project-oriented needs.

Culturepreneurs represent the spread of a model in which the biography of work is derived from the kinds of lives led by classic artists. The job market for artists generally has long been one of the most dynamic and flexible part-time job markets. Discontinuous careers are the rule here. Frequent changes between employment and non-employment and between various forms of work are the order of the day (Wiedemeyer and Friedrich 163). Culturepreneurs have adopted this model in all of its contrasting facets. Their masterly marketing of their own labour is set against an existential insecurity, hidden by a playful Bohemian attitude.

Expert knowledge within the economy of attention hides a struggle to maintain one's own position in society. As creative labour entrepreneurs, Culturepreneurs (are forced to) take on the role of forerunners in the flexibilisation of the job market. Thus flexibilisation will, in all probability, grow to encompass other sections of the service economy (Wiedemeyer and Friedrich 167ff).

This economic interface function of the Culturepreneurs is also clear at the dissolving borders between mainstream and subculture. Once, youth practices and subcultural practices served as a means to distinguish their practitioners from those in mainstream formations, but now maintaining this form of demarcation is, according to my findings, becoming ever more difficult. The old dichotomy has been replaced by new social formations, which no longer display a rigid contrast between mainstream and subculture, and profit-oriented service provision and cultural production, and which – through the constant and simultaneous processes of reshuffling and recoding – mediate between different social groupings. Those on the left complain about the much cited “sell-out of the underground”, but it is also true that no clear mainstream can be recognised either. Difference, rather than adaptation, is the main driving force behind post-modern consumption and this has led to a hybridisation of the mainstream and to a multiplicity of heterogeneous styles and groups. Hitzler and Pfadenhauer (“Let your body” 90) speak of “post-traditional forms of community formation”, in which post-modern concepts such as individuality and community combine to produce a loose temporary structure, which is only momentarily binding.

The Culturepreneur's functioning can generate affective identification processes only retrospectively. The linguistic analogy between the sociological category "Szene" (German for "scene") and the spatial category "in Szene setzen" (German for "be the centre of interest") links scenes to the radiation of a physical place. Club events, gallery, shop, exhibition and office openings, for example, are stagings and temporary place-makings of scenes on the urban stage, where agents use the urban fabric, the city or concrete buildings, to create networked relationships of power, meaning and tension in order to test new products. This social formation "scene" experiences and performs itself in its materiality and corporeality through its emotional presence at and with the places it selects. Consciously constructed places enable individuals to see and to be seen. These protagonists are at once both, participant and spectator, both equipped with subtle knowledge and skills of knowing how to get "in the scene" and "staying out" of (other) scenes. According to Blum, "scenes evoke the sign of tribal hegemony because their practices always means the rule of a specialized solidarity at that site" ("Scenes" 18).

The Culturepreneurs studied take on a central role in the constitution of professional scenes, in particular through helping to develop new urban coding formations. The synthetic (pioneering) achievement of the Culturepreneurs lies in the fact that they stage new tension-loaded and ambivalent location images and motifs even in places that have fallen out of the traditional logic of urban use. Existing urban material is brought into relationship with their entrepreneurial as well as artistic activity and contributes, in combination with what is physically present, to an ambivalent visibility of the location. This (locational) policy of temporary hiding and disappearance must be interpreted in the context of the development of heterogeneous scene practices. Hitzler, Bucher and Niederbacher identify these practices for the most part a-physically and in unclear relation to built space and not just to social space. The findings of the Culturepreneurs presented here, using the example of Berlin, demonstrate that the Culturepreneurs in Berlin provide evidence that they use their respective localities especially for entrepreneurial activities. First of all, they build up that tension-loaded relationship which guarantees them artistic and entrepreneurial

attention in the wider Berlin scenes. In this sense, the protagonists are representatives of a “network sociality” (Lash, “Network Sociality”; Wittel 75). Relational global networking and novel creative place-making methods on the local level are their vehicles to overstep the classical “handiwork” concept and to redefine the relationship between art and economy, subculture and mainstream, city and city image, and city and individual.

The fact that greatly distorted, sometimes romantic, often very imaginative spatial images are thus designed, all of which flirt with the socio-political realities, cannot be attributed either to an outflow from the hedonistic society, or to the spatial blindness of the Culturepreneurs. It is rather the case, that these Culturepreneurs prove themselves to be the architects of spatial scavenging and recycling. As ‘space pioneers’, they position themselves in perforated places of the city, places which, through deindustrialisation and reorganisation of the infrastructure, have fallen out of the cycle of economic use and out of the everyday awareness of urban society. Apparently functionless spaces, useless, neglected, leftover, and forgotten places have come to exist here. In short, inner city micro-peripheries are thus reconstituted. In an age of ever more closely controlled, staged shopping paradises and Disneyfied city areas, the Culturepreneurs conjure up memories of the instabilities of the face of the nineteenth century city, by means of temporary use, locational politics of hiding, and spatial visions.

Culturepreneurs may be considered as social switchpoints in an individualised society, in which new formations will be tested, and scenes formed and opened. Their entrepreneurial activity is characterised by fast moving fluctuations in spatial location. The mechanisms driving this rapid change may be sought in the spatial potential, as well as in the relatively unclear future of the city of Berlin. They might also be found in the Culturepreneurs themselves, in the ways in which they express their social integration in the game with existing powers.

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